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# The “Desecrated Mind” & Its Alternatives: Dante Rossetti and Political Economy

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Dante Rossetti’s poem “Jenny,” first conceived in 1848 but not published until 1870, is almost exclusively discussed in the contexts of contemporary prostitution and the idea of “the fallen woman.” This focus is of course entirely appropriate given that the poem is made up of an address to a prostitute by an educated and contemplative speaker, and also contains an overt comparison between Jenny and the speaker’s young and innocent “cousin Nell.”<sup>1</sup> The poem’s connection to Rossetti’s unfinished painting Found (1853-82) also supports this approach, for the painting depicts “a young man from the country” rescuing what appears to be “his fallen sweetheart” from a life of urban prostitution.<sup>2</sup> For Amanda Anderson, “Jenny” thus records “the extreme intersubjective distortions that characterize encounters with the fallen.”<sup>3</sup> Daniel Harris, similarly, reads Rossetti’s narrative as an attempt “to wrest free from” the “powerful public censorship” surrounding prostitution that is “so internalized” that Rossetti “cannot readily discover his own attitudes.”<sup>4</sup> But for all the considerable merit of readings such as these, discussions of Rossetti’s poem in relation to the contexts of contemporary prostitution have tended to overlook, or to misread, one of the poem’s key ideas, and have consequently obscured a very important political orientation of the poem. The idea I am referring to is encapsulated in the phrase “Jenny’s desecrated mind”, which brings together two contemporary assumptions that are highly contentious by the midpoint of the nineteenth century (1849). The first of these is that, because Jenny’s mental capacities have been formed by the repeated actions of her occupation, her mind must have atrophied, and

become so stunted that its intellectual capacities are all but non-existent. The second, consequent assumption (which is explored at length in the lines around this phrase, as we shall see) is that such a mind will have no ability for self-reflection and thus no conception of its own atrophied state. The debates surrounding these ideas are not to be found in contemporary writing about prostitution, however, or about gender politics more broadly. Instead, they are an important feature of the period's political economy, the crucible in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for debating the interrelations between commercial exchange and human capability. The present essay seeks to develop a full portrait of what is at stake in the idea of Jenny's mind's desecration, and to thereby demonstrate the considerable extent to which Rossetti's poem engages with contemporary political economy. It will thus have three components. First, it will reconstruct political economy's analysis of the different mental capacities engendered by commercial society's class relations. Second, it will demonstrate the extent to which the mid-nineteenth century witnesses a thorough reconsideration of this issue, both in the hands of those decades' most influential political economist, John Stuart Mill, and in those of one of that discourse's most famous critics, John Ruskin. Finally, this essay will illustrate the manner in which Rossetti's poem thoroughly dramatizes political economic patterns of thought at the same time as offering an opportunity of thinking outside that discourse's assumptions and conclusions.

## I

Let us begin, then, with a brief history of the "desecrated mind" in the discourse of political economy, bearing in mind that because this idea is so intertwined with political economy's core beliefs, it will be necessary also to give a flavor of that discourse's overall analysis of commercial society. The idea that societies structured around economic exchange limit the

mental capacities of the majority of their members is a key feature even of the first exponents of political economy, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson. Ferguson, for instance, whose Essay on the History of Civil Society was published in 1767, peppers his detailed analysis of the tensions of commercial society with repeated reminders of the intellectual downside of that system. In a society in which most people perform manual labor, he observes that “[m]any mechanical arts [...] require no capacity” and “succeed best under a total suppression of sentiment and reason.”<sup>5</sup> But he also goes further than this coincidence of labor and incapacity by stating that most of the occupations of commercial society “actually tend to contract and to limit the views of the mind.”<sup>6</sup> For Ferguson, therefore, commercial life is actively destructive, “suppressing” the very qualities that characterize humanity to the late eighteenth-century mind. And this effect is so dramatic that human actors are reduced to objects and commodities in this system: man deals with man, Ferguson observes, “as he does with his cattle and his soil, for the sake of the profits they bring.”<sup>7</sup>

While Ferguson’s Essay is also animated by a strikingly positive conception of human activity and therefore capability, he is considerably less sanguine than many of his contemporaries about the value and permanence of commercial society.<sup>8</sup> This is in large part because his writing is deeply indebted to the classical republican tradition and its belief that ancient Greece and Rome represent the high-points of human civilization.<sup>9</sup> It is striking, however, that Ferguson’s deeply negative ideas about the effects of economic relations are echoed directly by Adam Smith, in what is often seen as his celebration of laissez-faire economics, the Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, of 1776.<sup>10</sup> For Smith, who analyses the workings of the division of labor with a depth and detail that surpasses the work of his contemporaries and predecessors alike, the stultifying nature of commercial patterns of behavior is also extreme:

In the progress of the division of labour, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour, that is, of the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few very simple operations; frequently to one or two. But the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.<sup>11</sup>

This last phrase, “as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become,” is so powerful that it threatens to undo the positivity of the rest of Smith’s work regarding commercial society and the various stages of economic development to be found in other nations. Smith’s overall contention is that the division of labor is a natural consequence of man’s tendency to “truck and barter” and that such specialization of employment is the ultimate engine of human progress and wealth.<sup>12</sup> The context of this quotation is that Smith is recording why state-funded education may be necessary in a society like eighteenth-century Britain. But the rhetoric Smith uses cannot fail to position the extremely stultifying nature of most occupations as one of commercial society’s most significant features, and one that “nomadic” or “barbarous” nations have so far escaped. Smith’s dramatic language here significantly cuts against the thrust of the rest of his work, in other words. Smith also gives Ferguson’s version of this idea even more precision in this quotation. Because the

“understanding” is “necessarily formed” by one’s “employment,” the emaciation of the mind is relentless and almost total, for the majority of the working population of a commercial society are “confined” to the repeated performance of a small number of “simple operations.” I say the “majority” of a population here, because for both Smith and Ferguson commercial society also engenders the opposite effects to intellectual stultification. For those who oversee labor, or whose specialization is a species of philosophy itself, for instance, the complexity of activities taking place in commercial society leads to a flourishing, and maximizing, of intellectual capacity.<sup>13</sup> But the most abundant effect of economically organized life, in late eighteenth-century political economy, is distinctly the opposite of this.

The influence of Smith’s Wealth of Nations, and of its mode of analysis, is so decisive that political economy for the first half of the nineteenth century takes this idea of the stultifying effect of commercial society for granted.<sup>14</sup> David Ricardo, for instance, in his On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation of 1817, develops a deductive, mathematical mode of political economy that barely concerns itself with the contingencies of human nature or the individual consequences of economic exchange. In the terms of Michio Morishima, “[o]n the basis of clearly defined concepts” Ricardo “logically examine[s] relationships and rigorously deduce[s] economic laws [...] from the explicitly postulated hypotheses [...] concerning free competition and rational behaviour.”<sup>15</sup> But despite this rigorous postulation of rational behavior and this highly systematic approach to economic interactions, Ricardo nevertheless repeatedly refers to the stultifying nature of an advanced division of labor in terms that evoke Smith’s description. Thus he talks of “the evils” that result from “a want of education in all ranks of the people” in advanced commercial societies, the tendency for a population to slip into habits of “indolence” stemming from a lack of foresight and self-reflection, and the manner in which the development of “machinery” has a tendency to “deteriorate the condition of the labourer.”<sup>16</sup> The fact that ideas such as these

occur in a work which overtly considers human agents as ciphers in a series of mathematical scenarios, and that thus has almost nothing to say of human nature,<sup>17</sup> illustrates the extent to which the notion of the stultifying effect of commercial society has become an intellectual commonplace by the early nineteenth century.

Thomas Malthus primary work of political economy, his Principles of Political Economy, Considered With a View to Their Practical Application of 1820, maintains this emphasis on the restricted mental capacities attendant on commercial society, and this pattern of allusion to Smith's analysis of the problem. This is perhaps no surprise given that Malthus's work, according to John Pullen, "had its origins in a long-standing but unsuccessful proposal to publish a work on Adam Smith,"<sup>18</sup> and given the fact that Malthus had been lecturing on Smith's political economy since 1806.<sup>19</sup> Smith phrases the threat of intellectual stultification to society as stemming from the severe reduction in the martial and moral capabilities of the majority of a population, in a passage just after my long quotation from him. Repetitive and narrow work apparently renders workers incapable of "conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment," incapacitated from performing most of the "duties" of private, let alone those of public life, and inhibited from "defending" their society in combat.<sup>20</sup> Malthus invokes both the issue of "defense" and "tender sentiments" when he observes that one ought to "contemplate with no small alarm a great increase in the proportion of our manufacturing population, both with reference to the happiness and to the liberty of our country."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Malthus's repeated concern for the side effects of economic development leads to a strikingly direct set of statements about the alternatives to labor at the climax of his Principles. There, he makes use of the design of his work as a series of analyses of the "disputed areas" of political economy since "the æra" of "the Economists and Adam Smith"<sup>22</sup> to stand back from technical detail and interject the following direct moral opinion:

I have always thought and felt that many among the labouring classes in this country work too hard for their health, happiness, and intellectual improvement; and, if a greater degree of relaxation from severe toil could be given to them with a tolerably fair prospect of its being employed in innocent amusements and useful instruction, I should consider it as very cheaply purchased, by the sacrifice of a portion of the national wealth and populousness.<sup>23</sup>

This passage sets the occupations and activities of “the labouring classes” in direct opposition to their “health, happiness” and “intellectual” capabilities. In this sense this is a fuller statement of Ricardo’s notion of the “deterioration” of the condition of the laborer in commercial society, and another echo of Smith’s concern for the moral and mental state of workers. Just like Smith, Malthus’s language serves to cast the worker’s lot as unfairly biased towards physical activity, and away from the life of the mind: “severe toil” ought to be much more balanced by “amusements” and “instruction.”

An important orientation of these considerations in Malthus’s writing is that he immediately depicts the rebalancing of working-class life on this plan as a virtual impossibility, and therefore affirms the stultification of the majority of a population as an immovable fact of commercial society. He tells us that for all the ardor of his opinions, “the attempt to legislate directly in the teeth of one of the most general principles by which the business of society is carried on, namely, the principle of competition, must inevitably and necessarily fail.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, “with the single exception of the increased degree of prudence to be expected among the laboring classes of society from the progress of education and general improvement, [...] all the other tendencies are precisely in an opposite direction.”<sup>25</sup>



What this means is that, much like Smith's acknowledgement of the emaciation of the laborer's mental capacities in a work that thoroughly champions the powers of the division of labor, early nineteenth-century political economy repeatedly flags up the significant problem of mental stultification, but only to cast it as intractable. The desecration of the minds of the majority of a population is therefore a repeated preoccupation of political economy, but one that goes so thoroughly against the grain of all of its other insights that it must remain as a kind of undesirable but necessary side effect.

## II

This impasse of the worker's mental stultification is thus a predominant feature of political economy for the first seven decades of its existence. But it is highly significant for the consideration of Rossetti's poem we will come to presently, that in 1848, with the publication of John Stuart Mill's Principles of Political Economy, with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy, this tension between economic progress and mental emaciation is comprehensively reconceptualized. For Mill's highly innovative mode of political economy shows considerable awareness of the theory of stultification, but in fact ultimately argues against that theory.<sup>26</sup> Let us look at one of Mill's many expressions of the problem of stultification first, for his writing on this subject is often more graphic and dramatic than even Smith's analysis:

If the bulk of the human race are always to remain as at present, slaves to toil in which they have no interest, and therefore feel no interest—drudging from early morning till late at night for bare necessities, and with all the intellectual and moral deficiencies

which that implies—without resources either in mind or feelings—untaught, for they cannot be better taught than fed; selfish, for all their thoughts are required for themselves; without interest or sentiments as citizens and members of society, and with a sense of injustice rankling in their minds, equally for what they have not, and for what others have; I know not what there is which should make a person with any capacity of reason, concern himself about the destinies of the human race.<sup>27</sup>

This passage is an instance of a repeated rhetorical strategy in Mill's Principles of laying out a vision of social relations or problems that foregrounds received wisdom at its most negative, only to then thoroughly challenge and undermine that view with a positive conception of civilization's progress and a series of concrete strategies for fostering that progress. Mill's Principles are unique in political economy for offering an extended vision of a possible society of the future, and for their willing acceptance of the "stationary state" that Ricardo famously warns against.<sup>28</sup> In this quotation, Mill thus gives voice to the tendency we have picked out of earlier political economy to see the mental stultification of the majority of the population as a kind of inevitable fate. But he goes on, as we shall see, to mount a wholesale challenge to that fate. We should note, for now, that this passage recreates exactly the features of stultification expressed by Smith in the 1770s. Intense "toil" leads to thorough "intellectual and moral deficiencies" which bar the majority of a population from being effective citizens in any sense. Again, the language used to express this contemporary problem is extreme. Mill pictures swathes of a population "without resources either in mind or feelings," unable to think outside of their narrowly selfish interests to consider wider

issues, ideas or concerns. This is a formulation of stultification theory that stands very close to “Jenny’s desecrated mind,” as we will see.

Mill counters this pessimistic received wisdom on several levels throughout his Principles. The most sustained and significant expression of Mill’s alternative vision is to be found in his chapter “On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes.” The title of this section of Mill’s work alone signals the extent to which he goes beyond the generic rules of analytical political economy to consider the styles of progress human society might aim at.<sup>29</sup> Mill begins this chapter by again summarizing a closely connected piece of received wisdom in order to surpass it. This time it is the notion that there should or could be a “patriarchal or seigniorial influence” exerted by the upper classes on those beneath them, and that in this way the laboring majority of a population “should not be required or encouraged to think for themselves.”<sup>30</sup> Mill explodes this notion in a number of ways, but significantly focuses on the extent to which the model of the laboring classes’ mental stultification is inaccurate. Rather than leading to the kind of numbed, unconscious state of atrophy that all of his political economic predecessors have identified, Mill here pictures the effect of arduous and near-constant labor as a widening of consciousness, and what he significantly terms a mode of “spontaneous education going on in the minds of the multitude.”<sup>31</sup> The following passage spells out some of the impetuses to this highly significant development:

Of the working men, at least in the more advanced countries of Europe, it may be pronounced certain, that the patriarchal or paternal system of government is one to which they will not again be subject. That question was decided, when they were taught to read, and allowed access to newspapers and political tracts; when dissenting preachers were suffered to go among them, and appeal to their

faculties and feelings in opposition to the creeds professed and countenanced by their superiors; when they were brought together in numbers, to work socially under the same roof; when railways enabled them to shift from place to place, and change their patrons and employers as easily as their coats; when they were encouraged to seek a share in the government, by means of the electoral franchise. The working classes have taken their interests into their own hands, and are perpetually showing that they think the interests of their employers not identical with their own, but opposite to them. Some among the higher classes flatter themselves that these tendencies may be counteracted by moral and religious education: but they have let the time go by for giving an education which can serve their purpose.<sup>32</sup>

The central idea of this passage is one that is most often attributed to the writing of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. This is that the adverse conditions of labor for the working classes lead not to pervasive stultification, but to a growth of political intelligence and a rise in class consciousness. Engels's The Condition of the Working Class in England of 1845 makes this point repeatedly, for instance.<sup>33</sup> Mill's is the first expression of this idea in British political economy — published thirty-nine years before Engels's work is translated into English — and as we have seen it goes very significantly against the grain of his predecessors' thought. Mill also anticipates the logical consequence of this idea for Marx and Engels when he goes on to predict communal ownership as the necessary outcome of such class antagonism. His chapter on the "Probable Futurity" of the working class in fact devotes thirty dense pages to communal ownership, and these systems also feature heavily in the rest of his Principles.<sup>34</sup>

The close proximity of Mill's thought and Marxist analysis has led Bela Balassa to describe Marx's negative treatment of Mill throughout his writing as "one of the great puzzles of the history of economic thought."<sup>35</sup> For our current purposes, however, we must note that Mill's alternative model to laboring-class mental stultification is a rapidly increasing awareness of the wider economic and political situation, and therefore an enhancement of intellectual capacity and group awareness. Mill is also realistic in noting, just after this passage, that further formal education will enhance this nascent effect. But this passage nevertheless thoroughly challenges the idea that working-class life and labor themselves are stultifying, and that the mind is "desecrated" by its narrow sphere of exertion. The tense of this description, for instance, notably puts this rise of mental powers and class consciousness firmly in the past. Thus those among the "higher classes" that hark back to "patriarchal" models of "moral and religious education" are thoroughly out of date. The current world, at the midpoint of the nineteenth century, is one in which "this increase in intelligence" is especially marked, we are told, in the population of towns and cities.<sup>36</sup>

We should note that Mill performs this reconsideration of the stultification theory in reference to the male gender exclusively. It is "of working men" that he speaks, for example. This focus, and this clearly gendered language, follows the conventions of political economy since Smith and Ferguson, both of whom write of "man" and "men" even when clearly using these terms to refer to mankind as a whole. Mill, however, also anticipates the concerns of his 1869 essay on "The Subjection of Women" at this point in his Principles, by including a passage on the rising gender consciousness of women that accompanies the class consciousness we have already explored. There, Mill observes that "[t]he same reasons which make it no longer necessary that the poor should depend on the rich, make it equally unnecessary that women should depend on men."<sup>37</sup> In advocating the opening of "occupation[s]" and opportunities to women, Mill thus draws a direct parallel between the

stultification that formerly affected the worker and the intellectual emaciation that attends gender boundaries.<sup>38</sup> Both should be seen as outdated and as no-longer relevant in contemporary Britain.<sup>39</sup>

We are now almost ready to turn back to Rossetti's poem, now that we have traced the history standing behind the phrase the "desecrated mind," and now that we can see how the theory of mental stultification is under pressure by 1848, and can be associated from this moment with an outdated, "patriarchal and paternal" model of class relations. Mill's Political Economy stands as the authority in the field until the 1890s, "the economic bible," according to Donald Winch, "of the generation that came to maturity in the 1850s and 60s," especially those "with reformist and radical-liberal credentials."<sup>40</sup> And since the evidence for the rise of class consciousness in the first decades of the nineteenth century is obviously by no means confined to the pages of political economy,<sup>41</sup> the history of theorizing mental stultification that we have traced allows us to see that the intellectual capacity of the laboring classes is very much at issue during the years in which Rossetti works on "Jenny," 1848-70. It is at this historical moment that the desecration of the mind in accordance with the individual's occupation is still something of a commonplace, in other words, the received wisdom of a political economy that holds a central position in public and political life.<sup>42</sup> But at the same time the stultification theory is also now open to challenge, in the style of Mill's theory of "spontaneous education," or on the basis of the abundant evidence of burgeoning class — and gender — consciousness.

There is one final version of this challenge to the stultification theory that we must trace so as to be able to take in the full ramifications of Rossetti's treatment of these ideas, and it is one much more closely associated with Rossetti himself than any of the texts we have looked at so far. This is a mode of thought that takes direct issue with the political economy of Ricardo and Mill, and that was written by Rossetti's close associate between 1854 and 1865,

John Ruskin.<sup>43</sup> Ruskin's four essays "on the First Principles of Political Economy," which were published between August and November 1860 in the Cornhill Magazine and then collected under the title "Unto This Last" in 1862, build on the critical analysis of human capability in commercial society that Ruskin had developed in The Stones of Venice (1851-3). In the central chapter of that work, "The Nature of Gothic," Ruskin had celebrated Gothic architecture for releasing the laborer from the mental slavery that attends the perfection required by "Greek, Ninevite, and Egyptian" architecture, and for thereby making "a man of him," rather than "an animated tool."<sup>44</sup> Gothic buildings were thus seen as "betraying [...] imperfection in every touch," but as thereby "rais[ing] up [...] stately and unaccusable whole[s]."<sup>45</sup> Ruskin's attendant assertion, in "The Nature of Gothic" was that nineteenth-century Britain also treats the laborer in such a way that the "thoughtful" and imaginative parts of him are stunted and locked away.<sup>46</sup> And it is these concerns that are developed at greater length in "Unto This Last", which focuses explicitly on the discourse that justifies this state of affairs in the nineteenth century, political economy. "Unto This Last" thus performs a thorough and subtle critique of recent economic thought by juxtaposing its conceptions of key terms with a significantly wider view of value, productivity and human good derived primarily from Judeo-Christian theology. Francis O'Gorman summarizes Ruskin's project as contending that "Victorian society needs a model of economic activity which is humane, which understands the motivating role of the affections, which sees economics within the whole matrix of social activity, and which treats human beings in communities rather than as individuals seeking their own financial self-advancement."<sup>47</sup> As part of this series of contentions, Ruskin again takes repeated issue with political economy's idea of mental stultification. Towards the climax of the essay series, for instance, in the high-flung rhetoric that suits his religious model of justice, he gives voice to the conventional assumptions of political economy so as to dramatically counter its claims. The voice of the political

economist, in this context, questions the idea that “working people” might be “holy” by describing them as possessing “dim eyes and cramped limbs and slowly wakening minds,” as full of “sensual desire and grovelling thought,” “foul of body and coarse of soul.”<sup>48</sup> This caricature directly restates the portrait of laboring-class capability to be found from Ferguson to Malthus. Ruskin’s reassertion that these figures are indeed “pure” and “perfect,”<sup>49</sup> in direct contradiction of this voice, echoes the positive treatment of the intellectual and spiritual capacity of the laboring classes throughout “Unto This Last”. The first essay, for example, explains how trade, when practiced correctly, requires “the highest intelligence, as well as patience, kindness, and tact.”<sup>50</sup> From the very start of Ruskin’s analysis, similarly, the laboring classes are depicted as knowing very clearly how their “interests” are “antagonistic” to those of their masters, as if the stultification of the worker as it is imagined by the political economist is simply a myth, or a piece of ideological obfuscation.<sup>51</sup> Ruskin also takes issue with the belief and value system that makes those involved in commerce act as if stultification does indeed occur:

[T]he merchant is presumed to always act selfishly. His work may be very necessary to the community; but the motive of it is understood to be wholly personal. The merchant’s first object in all his dealings must be (the public believe) to get as much for himself, and leave as little to his neighbour (or customer) as possible. Enforcing this upon him, by political statute, as the necessary principle of his action; recommending it to him on all occasions, and themselves reciprocally adopting it, proclaiming vociferously, for the law of the universe, that a buyer’s function is to cheapen, and a seller’s to cheat,—the public, nevertheless, involuntarily condemn the man of



commerce for his compliance with their own statement, and stamp him for ever as belonging to an inferior grade of human personality.<sup>52</sup>

While in Ruskin's terminology the "merchant" here refers to the master-tradesman rather than manual laborer, this is nevertheless a powerful deconstruction of the social mechanism that stands behind, and then enforces, the stultification theory, and one that applies just as directly to the laborer. The nub of Ruskin's argument is therefore that any assertion of the worker's cramped intellectual and moral capability is in fact a mode of ideology seeking to make that the case. It is by building on far-reaching observations like this that the fourth essay of the series concludes that political economy's model of exchange is "simply nugatory," because it is one that is founded on asserting and maintaining the "ignorance and incapacity" of the person being traded with.<sup>53</sup> When this conceit is exploded, as Ruskin's text strives to do, political economy is exposed as utterly empty. It thrives on keeping the poor stultified, "in a dim-eyed and narrow-chested state of being," when it should be maximizing and fostering their innate condition, as "full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures."<sup>54</sup>

### III

Ruskin's analysis of political economy holds that discourse's stultification theory as one of its primary targets. Every one of the four essays returns to it in one form or another, and the idea that political economy's conception of wealth is deeply implicated in rendering the working classes mentally stunted is one of Ruskin's main contentions. The notion of a happy, pure, intelligent, and moral individual that is actually representative of working-class

capability therefore also recurs time and again in Ruskin's essays. What this means for the present analysis of Rossetti's "Jenny" is that we now have further, detailed evidence of the extent to which the stultification theory is under pressure, around the middle of the nineteenth century. And importantly, Ruskin's proximity to Rossetti during the time in which the latter worked on "Jenny" makes Rossetti's interest in the idea of the mind's desecration even more concrete. (We will be able to return to this precise question of Ruskin's influence shortly.) We can therefore now, finally, turn to "Jenny" itself, and we can now explore how Rossetti's poem dramatizes both the pessimistic stultification theory we have traced in political economy, and thoroughly undermines that theory in a manner comparable to Mill or Ruskin.

First then, let us briefly clear up what might seem like a discrepancy between "Jenny" and the political economic ideas we have traced. For the constant focus of political economy's stultification theory has been the manual laborer, or the working classes as a whole. It may be thought, consequently, that Jenny's role as a prostitute marks her out as not entirely a manual laborer, or not strictly fitting into the laboring classes, as political economy conceives that group. There are, however, two important features of these texts that mean that Jenny and the subject of the political economic ideas we have been following do indeed align. The first of these is that Rossetti directly casts Jenny as one who labors, in the poem, and therefore sets up her social role as physical work par excellence. This takes place a hundred lines into the poem, where its speaker's contemplation of the status of Jenny's existence turns to the issue of her repose itself:

Behold the lilies of the field,  
They toil not neither do they spin;  
(So doth the ancient text begin,—  
Not of such rest as one of these

Can share.)

(100-104)

These lines paradoxically describe Jenny's repose itself as a species of labor. Her lot, her financial and social status, is utterly tied to work, unlike the Gospel of Matthew's "lilies of the field." Even her "rest," therefore, is not in fact rest, but is akin to "toiling" and "spinning." Rossetti's poem thus renders Jenny a laborer above all else, and in fact casts her as laboring, even for the duration of the speaker's contemplation that constitutes the poem. We should note here too the pejorative reference to Jenny as "one of these" in this quotation. For it seems to imply that it is her laboring-class status that marks her out for a life of toil. The second way in which the subject matter of Rossetti's poem is germane to political economy is that that discourse repeatedly defines labor as any repetitive task performed with the body. Thus its stultification theory, as we saw briefly in the case of Smith and Ferguson, is applicable to any member of society who is not financially free of the obligation to labor, or whose labor is not the predominantly mental labor of oversight or philosophy. In accordance with this fact, it is notable that the protagonists of Rossetti's poem are divided along exactly the lines of this distinction. Positioning the poem's speaker as one who spends the "hours" of his "day and night" (26) in his room "so full of books" (23), and whose "cherished work" (27) is clearly intellectual, serves to cast that speaker as insulated from the pervasive stultification of commercial society because of the constant stimulation and exercise his mind receives. The allusive and rhetorical elegance of the poem is a direct manifestation of his subtle and varied mind. And in contradistinction to the poem's speaker, Jenny's status as a prostitute does not offer any kind of immunity from the stultification theorized by political economy. Rather, as her work is not just manual but fully bodily, it renders her in many respects its exemplar.

With this sense of how Rossetti's poem announces itself along directly political economic lines, we can now look at Rossetti's direct recreation of the stultification theory through his deployment of the phrase that I have been referring to since the beginning of this essay, the "desecrated mind." Here is verse paragraph in which this idea occurs:

Let the thoughts pass, and empty cloud!  
 Suppose I were to think aloud,—  
 What if to her all this were said?  
 Why, as a volume seldom read  
 Being opened halfway shuts again,  
 So might the pages of her brain  
 Be parted at such words, and thence  
 Close back upon the dusty sense.  
 For is there hue or shape defin'd  
 In Jenny's desecrated mind,  
 Where all the contagious currents meet,  
 A Lethe of the middle street?  
 Nay, it reflects not any face,  
 Nor sound is in its sluggish pace,  
 But as they coil those eddies clot,  
 And night and day remember not. (155-70)

In his treatment of these lines, Daniel Harris recognizes the speaker's "most reactionary" utterances, but conflates the simile of the book on this occasion with the other references to Jenny as book in the poem. This causes him to claim the book is "associated" here "with the

female genitals,” and to assert that these lines show “how, in a repressive society, reading is magnified into its sexual ‘equivalent’ in a manner that erases all distinctions between mental and physical acts.”<sup>55</sup> Robin Sheets, meanwhile, argues that the “book metaphor” here “indicates that the narrator regards culture as a form of male privilege” and associates Jenny with “one of those ‘bad books’ denounced by preachers for inflaming the male imagination and inducing masturbation.”<sup>56</sup> The political economic context elaborated in this essay so far allows us to read these lines much more precisely. For they recreate exactly the analysis of the laboring classes that we traced from Ferguson to Malthus, and saw reflected in Mill. Or to put it another way, they brand Jenny with the same dim-wittedness that Ruskin casts as a primary myth of political economy. These lines thus effectively paraphrase Smith’s judgment of laboring-class “stupidity” and “ignorance,” or Mill’s notion of pervasive “intellectual and moral deficienc[y].” Jenny’s mind is “desecrated” because even the speaker’s analysis of her state that borders on the offensively pejorative would — apparently — be impenetrable to her. Her mind, once a new and supple book like she was once a “handful of bright spring-water,” is now so dusty and stiff that it cannot perform its primary function, the representation or recording of words and thought (16). The speaker’s words would thus apparently “part” the “pages” of her brain, but with only momentary success, and to no effect.

The metaphor of the second half of this quotation renders the mind’s apparent desecration even more total than the book simile, and even more connected to the notion of moral impurity that we saw Smith and Mill stress. Jenny’s mind is apparently a gutter, “[w]here all contagious currents,” the waste of an entire city, “meet.” This notion of filthy, pestilent liquid manifests Jenny’s apparent lack of self-reflection, and thus lack of consciousness of her atrophied state, because the gutter “reflects not any face, / Nor sound is in its sluggish pace.” If even the basic constituents of social life are unreflected in this mind, then its ability to grasp an idea, or any version of class consciousness, is utterly non-existent.

Further, even the basic function of memory is denied to Jenny from this perspective: the water's "eddies" distort the actual flow of events so that this hopelessly stunted mind cannot "remember" "night and day." The desecration described by these images is so total that existence would be blur for the version of Jenny being portrayed. This is a conception of intellectual ability more thoroughly degraded than even Ruskin's "foul of body and coarse of soul." We are closer to Mill's notion of an individual and a class "without resources in either mind or feelings," and firmly in the mode of casting laboring-class individuals as distinctly less human than figures like the poem's speaker. Outside of these lines, Jenny's stultifyingly repetitive work is also cast as so powerfully negative that even the "dial" of her "clock" might "scorn itself" because it "has such hours to register" (221-2). This, much like the images surrounding the phrase "Jenny's desecrated mind," is a case of the stultification theory masquerading as physical fact. The mental and moral emaciation that attends repetitive bodily labor is apparently so powerfully concrete that it infects even the inanimate objects around Jenny.

Now, it is crucial to the politics of Rossetti's poem to keep in mind that the judgments of the poem's speaker are by no means facts. What is described in these lines relating to Jenny's mind — or in those relating to her clock — are not concrete realities but very extreme statements of belief, or ideology, that "stamp" the laborer "as belonging to an inferior grade of human personality," to use Ruskin's terms. And just like Ruskin's analysis, Rossetti's poem also very clearly raises the possibility of the pure, moral, intellectually capable laboring-class mind, in contradistinction to this ideology of inferiority that we have just identified. Like the final stages of Mill's Political Economy then, and very much like "Unto This Last" as we shall see, Rossetti's poem also offers us a way of thinking about human interaction that moves away from the dominant terms of political economy. This is

achieved by two distinct strategies in “Jenny,” one of which will necessitate a formal analysis of the poem, the other a detailed engagement with the speaker’s fluctuating tone.

Let us tackle the question of form first, and do so by turning to an analysis of the genre of dramatic monologue itself. For Rossetti’s chosen form in “Jenny” is ideally suited to the task of probing the validity of contemporary assumptions, as Alan Sinfield records in his thorough analysis of dramatic monologue: “[i]n the nineteenth century dramatic monologue assumes unprecedented importance but almost at once the feint is exploited self-consciously to express dissatisfaction with common-sense assumptions about the nature of consciousness and of the world.”<sup>57</sup> What Sinfield is referring to by the term “feint” here is the manner in which dramatic monologue sets up a doubling of consciousness, and a kind of productive tension, between its author and its fictional speaker (or thinker). This form then tilts its representation towards either the speaker’s fictionality or the author’s own reality:

If there is a heavy apparatus of circumstantial detail which establishes for the speaker a world which we know is not the poet’s, then the feint begins to approximate to fiction. If, alternatively, the speaker is relatively unlocated in time and place so that there is little beyond the title, say, to remind us that it is not supposed to be the poet speaking, then the feint is closer to the poet’s “I.”<sup>58</sup>

The case of “Jenny” is obviously one in which the “circumstantial detail” of the poem fits reasonably well with what we know of Rossetti himself. An educated speaker whose work is literary visits a prostitute in terms which align well with Rossetti’s locale and wonted behavior. Rossetti’s poem is thus representative of how dramatic monologue can probe, and

cast subtle doubt on, a series of attitudes and opinions notably close to home. Sinfield expresses this overall effect as follows:

What we experience in dramatic monologue — and it is a quality which is not easily gained in other modes — is a divided consciousness. We are impressed, with the full strength of first-person presentation, by the speaker and feel drawn into his point of view, but at the same time are aware that he is a dramatic creation and there are other possible, even preferable perspectives. This condition is a precise consequence of the status of dramatic monologue as feint: we are obliged to posit simultaneously the speaking “I” and the poet’s “I.”<sup>59</sup>

It is this idea of “other possible, even preferable perspectives” that is essential to the workings of Rossetti’s “Jenny,” and essential to understanding how the poem positions both contemporary stultification theory and political economic thought more generally. In the “desecrated mind” passages we have already considered, it is quite clear that the “other possible perspectives” include the notion that Jenny’s mind is actually intelligent, moral and capable, that were the speaker’s opinions voiced to her, she would not only comprehend them but have a series of cogent challenges to them. This is not to say that such a judgment or possibility is any closer to fact than the judgments of the poem’s speaker. Rather, Rossetti’s poem participates in the process of challenging stultification theory, alongside Ruskin and Mill, by configuring an extreme expression of that theory as over-blown, over-stated, and just one of many possible ways of describing Jenny. The irony and inherent tension of dramatic



monologue is aimed, in the parts of this poem we have looked at so far, precisely at the notion that the laborer's mind is so stunted as to be utterly lacking in self-awareness.

The inverse logic of the dramatic monologue obviously saturates the whole of Rossetti's poem, meaning that all of the speaker's judgments of Jenny are implicitly ironized or opened up to potential reconsideration. Almost every instance of this effect, moreover, also serves to comment on the idea of Jenny's stultification, and to flesh out the potential alternatives to that hypothesis. The poem's opening verse paragraph is a case in point. Here are its first few ways of describing Jenny:

Lazy laughing languid Jenny,  
 Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea,  
 Whose head upon my knee to-night  
 Rests for a while, as if grown light  
 With all our dances and the sound  
 To which the wild tunes spun you round:  
 Fair Jenny mine, the thoughtless queen  
 Of kisses which the blush between  
 Could hardly make much daintier;                      (1-9)

Here again, in the poem's opening judgment of Jenny, we find the notion that she is "thoughtless," that her intellectual and moral capabilities are non-existent. What the speaker casts as her "fondness" for "kisses," and — by the symmetry of the second line — her equal "fondness" for money thus align with the coarse selfishness of Ruskin's caricature of political economy's stultification. Jenny is the "thoughtless queen / Of kisses" because her existence is purely physical except for her selfishness for personal gain. Intimately connected to this

supposed predominance of physicality in her existence, Jenny's repose, which lasts for the duration of the poem, is here cast as a symptom of her extreme physicality. She rests "as if grown light" by the spinning motion and "wild" sound of all the "dances" she has taken with the speaker. Her solely physical way of interacting with the world is overpowered by the intensity of dancing, in other words, while the speaker's mental acuity insulates him from physicality's effects. As he goes on to record, the "cloud's not danced out of" his "brain" (43): for him intellectual experience is primary, whereas for Jenny all experience is coarsely physical.

Again, therefore, these judgments invoke — inversely, as it were — the notion that Jenny is indeed thinking rather than thoughtless; that her rest is not a symptom of her intellectual incapacity but a welcome and consciously chosen pause in a lifetime of drudgery; that her seeming fondness for kisses and money, like her dainty blushes between each kiss, are the necessary postures of her trade rather than her most fundamental and essential characteristics. Thus when this first paragraph of the poem ends with the speaker asking "[w]hose person or whose purse may be / The lodestar of [her] reverie," the most pressing, unvoiced answer is that she may not be romantically dreaming of any man at all, let alone of either his genitals or his money (these being the double-meanings of "purse"). Jenny's "reverie" may be diametrically opposed to that imagined by the poem's speaker, in the same way that the auditor of Samuel Coleridge's "Eolian Harp" (1795), the poet's wife Sara, is eventually reported as disagreeing entirely with every judgment made by the speaker in that poem. Harris picks out Coleridge as a key precursor of Rossetti's silent monologue form, but refers only to the mute auditor of "Frost at Midnight" (1798) as a forerunner of Jenny.<sup>60</sup> "The Eolian Harp" is in fact a much closer intertext, and provides a much more telling comparison, because of the innate and pervasive disagreement that poem dramatizes.

The prescriptive handling of Jenny's "reverie" in the poem's opening paragraph of course foreshadows the fuller account of her dream in the last stages of the poem. There too, the image of luxuriant femininity captured in the phrase, "the acknowledged belle / Apparelled beyond parallel" (362-3), and the confident assertion that the speaker and his kind "know" Jenny's "dreams" (364), serve as problematic overstatements of Jenny's state of mind and concerns. In this instance the dramatic irony is even hinted at in the awkwardly over-blown assonance and internal rhyme throughout "belle / Apparelled beyond parallel," and in the speaker's pompous use of the first-person plural, "we" (364). Again, consequently, a set of possibilities for Jenny's "dreams" are invoked that do not play into political economy's notion of conspicuous wealth. These might resolve around questions of justice or fairness, if one was to take terms from Ruskin's analysis. But the point of Rossetti's deployment of the ideology of luxury here is that, in this inherently ironic context that inverts the logic of any judgment, the poem raises the specter of thinking outside of political economic categories. In a comparable manner to how Ruskin systematically rejects political economy's definitions, or to how Mill reconceptualizes the stultification theory of his predecessors, Rossetti's poem puts together the repeatedly and conventionally commercial patterns of thought of its speaker in order to cumulatively raise the possibility of their inappropriateness, and inaccuracy.

We are now in a position to move to the second manner in which Rossetti's poem raises the possibility of human interaction that does not conform to political economy's categories. It is this second strand of the poem that will require not analysis of the poem's form, but attention to its meandering and changeable content. We should note, to begin with, that the thought-process of Rossetti's speaker in fact oscillates between the kind of inherently problematic judgments we have been focusing on, and moments of a different character that function as possible insights into Jenny's condition in a less pejorative sense. These

moments, importantly, also build to a very direct engagement with the dominant perspective found in Ruskin's "Unto This Last". There are brief but unsustained moments of this sort scattered throughout the early stages of the poem. The opening paragraph's water analogy that foreshadows the gutter's eddies is one such instance. There, Jenny is seen as a "Poor handful of bright spring-water / Flung in the whirlpool's shrieking face," as if she could still be characterized by her initial purity before the economic and sexual politics of the poem's urban setting took hold (16-17). The speaker's brief suggestion that Jenny may be "merely glad" that he is not "ruffianly" also moves in this direction, for it assigns a more practical and contemplative thought to the poem's addressee (64-5). The most significant moment of this kind in the speaker's mental monologue, however, is positioned as a direct alternative to the stultification hypothesis we have already examined. When the speaker extends that theory to Jenny's clock, that is, he also immediately raises an alternative, the rhetoric of which is much closer to Ruskin's critique of economic thought than to political economy itself:

How Jenny's clock ticks on the shelf!  
Might not the dial scorn itself  
That has such hours to register?  
Yet as to me, even so to her  
Are golden sun and silver moon,  
In daily largesse of earth's boon,  
Counted for life-coins to one tune.  
And if, as blindfold fates are toss'd,  
Through some one man this life be lost,  
Shall soul not somehow pay for soul? (220-29)

In Ruskin's third essay of "Unto This Last", he describes at some length the necessity of the rich and poor "meeting" and recognizing their common ground. Before analyzing these lines of Rossetti's, we must glance quickly at some of Ruskin's passage, as the two texts are at this point very closely aligned:

[T]he meeting, face to face, of rich and poor, is just as appointed and necessary a law of that world as the flow of stream to sea, or the interchange of power among the electric clouds:—"God is their maker." But, also, this action may be either gentle and just, or convulsive and destructive: it may be by rage of devouring flood, or by lapse of serviceable wave [...]. And which of these it shall be, depends on both rich and poor knowing that God is their light; that in the mystery of human life, there is no other light than this by which they can see each other's faces, and live[.]<sup>61</sup>

Ruskin here challenges political economy's separation of humanity into capable and incapable, along the lines of the stultification theory, by defining all human life as equal from his Biblical perspective. Thus when rich and poor face each other, they can do so in many postures, gently or destructively, with force or with kindness. But, according to this view, the ultimately "just" and correct version of such a meeting is a recognition of their shared position in relation to God's "light." Rossetti's lines must be seen to stage a meeting very close indeed to this vision of Ruskin's. In stark contradiction to the stultification theory that opens Rossetti's verse paragraph, the alternative vision of the poem's speaker is one of his and Jenny's shared ground under the "lights" of the "golden sun and silver moon." Where the speaker's political economic judgments repeatedly refer to "coins" and exchange in a manner

that asserts Jenny's inferiority, these lights are instead "life-coins" that unite speaker and addressee "to one tune." The different physical and intellectual responses to dancing that are dramatized in the poem's opening are also now invoked again to cast both figures as equals of a fundamentally identical shared existence. Thus the verse paragraph ends with the notion that both lives are worth an equal amount, and with a fitting ambiguity as to whose "life" might "be lost" in the penultimate line's vision of a chance death. These lines might thus be read as staging a "gentle" and "just" meeting between the poem's speaker and Jenny, to use Ruskin's terms. And in this context the large majority of the rest of the poem could be classed as a more "convulsive and destructive" encounter between these two figures.

This passage, consequently, opens up a visionary and far-reaching alternative to the poem's repeated instances of prescriptive, political economic modes of thought. It is one that makes use both of the contemporary climate of challenging political economy's stultification theory that we observed in Mill, and of the particularly thorough critique of that theory to be found in Ruskin. And one must note, if one wants to fully grasp the design of "Jenny," that Rossetti's poem ends on a note very similar to this Ruskinian optimism and gentleness, albeit again without the overtly Biblical frame of reference. In the poem's final paragraph, the poem's speaker backs down from his mostly pejorative series of judgments of Jenny in order to set up one last moment of something like reconciliation, or "meeting." There, explaining his "mock[ing]" of Jenny as stemming ultimately from his "own shame," he again draws Jenny and himself into close analogy in the following terms (383-4):

Well, of such thoughts so much I know:

In my life, as in hers, they show,

By a far gleam which I may near,

A dark path I can strive to clear. (387-90)

Invoking again the terminology of light and dark, and of sun and moon, from the last passage we examined, these lines dramatize the moral duty of life as a movement toward the divine light of justice that Ruskin describes, and that those previous lines picture. Both Jenny and the speaker must draw “near” to the “far gleam” of this light. And for both the primary issue of life is the “clear[ing]” of the “dark path” between the poem’s setting and that situation. This image is thus diametrically opposed to the extreme separation of protagonist and speaker that we observed in the “desecration” lines. There, the poem’s speaker was marked by his elevated powers of reflection and expression, while Jenny was cast as beneath consideration in exactly those qualities. Here, by contrast, the phrase “[i]n my life, as in hers” sets up a direct and unproblematic equivalence between the two figures. This is consequently a powerful vision of equality, not just in divine judgment, but in everyday activity. And it is a conception of the relationship between Jenny and the poem’s speaker that directly challenges the stultification theory that stands behind many of the poem’s key passages. One must note, too, that the tone and atmosphere of these closing lines privilege them as containing a different kind of knowledge to that found elsewhere in the poem. Almost every image deployed by the poem’s speaker for the majority of the poem is elaborate, literary, and extended over ten or fifteen lines at a time. These brief lines, on the other hand, are marked by their spare use of language and their minimalist iconography: the phrases “a far gleam” and a “dark path” both offer glimpses of — but simultaneously hold back — alternative styles of knowledge, and larger frames of reference, to those found elsewhere in the poem.

We observed, then, how Mill reported the conventional political economic wisdom of the worker's stultification only to replace that theory with his conception of "spontaneous education" and rapidly rising class and gender consciousness. We saw too Ruskin's attack on the ideology of stultification from the perspective of Christian justice and the complete equality of members of all classes. We have now followed Rossetti through his treatment of this same territory, and witnessed how "Jenny" gives voice to the conventions of political economic patterns of thought at the same time that it ironizes and goes beyond the assumptions of that discourse. We have therefore now seen that Rossetti's poem is significantly structured and inflected by the norms and assumptions of contemporary political economy. The poem builds on — and participates in — the contemporary climate of rethinking the ideology of inferiority that stands at the heart of political economy, and does so in terms close to those of Ruskin's project of the same nature. Recent criticism of Rossetti's poem has noticed isolated elements of these aspects of the poem. Harris, for example, highlights the poem's doubling of contemporary liberal and reactionary perspectives, and sees the poem as in part a "cultural criticism of depersonation;"<sup>62</sup> Sheets observes the poem's moments of "insight, guilt, and even despair" that are juxtaposed with its more pejorative statements;<sup>63</sup> and D. M. R. Bentley traces the growing "measure of spiritual regeneration" as the poem proceeds.<sup>64</sup> The criticism of these and other figures has very thoroughly and impressively delineated the poem's many sexual contexts and preoccupations, and I am certainly not seeking to denigrate these achievements with the present analysis. But the dominant focus of such criticism has been so tied to prostitution — or to issues closely related to this like pornography and representation of the female body — that the poem's significant political economic agenda and frame of reference have been obscured. Even when Ruskin's influence has been broached, it has been for his public statements about prostitution and fallen women.<sup>65</sup> The contextualization and analysis of Rossetti's poem that I have



performed here should thus be seen as complementary to the poem's recent prostitution-based scholarship. For the significance of Rossetti's poem lies in its simultaneous attention to — and complex interweaving of — a number of contemporary strands of thought. The assumptions of political economy and their alternatives should thus be added to the bodies of thought are understood as permeating Rossetti's poem.

We can now note, finally, that Rossetti's process of thinking against the grain of contemporary political economy is traceable quite minutely through the stages of the poem's composition. The poem's earliest surviving version, in the Delaware manuscript probably scripted "in 1859 or early 1860,"<sup>66</sup> dramatizes the stultification theory but does so without the phrase "Jenny's desecrated mind." There, Jenny's mind is simply a "volume, seldom read" the pages of which "[c]lose back upon the dusty sense" when the speaker voices his opinions. The manuscript includes a crossed-out line at this point which expands upon the effect of the speaker's words on the pages of Jenny's brain. These are apparently "[r]ocked in their wretched impotence," a phrase which seems to come from the "earliest," 1848 text of the poem, and which seems to refer to the emaciated powers of Jenny's mind.<sup>67</sup> But because this 1859-60 version of the poem — presumably like its 1848 predecessor — is spoken aloud rather than silently meditated, and because there is far less of a marked contrast in this version between pejorative and more sympathetic moments, this version of the stultification theory is not as clearly part of a doubled, ironic mode of expression. This poem's speaker is simply aligned, for a small amount of his speech, with the assumptions of political economy, and these are not probed in detail.

It is at this point in the poem's development, in 1860, that Ruskin's own famous criticism of the poem found it to be too brutal and "disorderly." Ruskin observed that "[t]he right feeling is unnatural" in the poem's speaker, and the poem "does not therefore truly touch us."<sup>68</sup> Some time in the wake of this criticism and before the 1869 "non-autographed

manuscript that stands closest to the text exhumed from” Rossetti’s “wife’s grave” in September 1869,<sup>69</sup> Rossetti modified the poem to render it the powerful critique of political economic patterns of thought we have followed in this essay. One might therefore cast these modifications as something like an answer to Ruskin’s criticism of the poem in the form of a homage to Ruskin’s own styles of thought. Alternatively one might describe the changes of the 1860s as moving the poem away from the overt sensuality of the Delaware manuscript, with its extended and graphic description of Jenny’s body, towards the Christian style of interpretation of social tension to be found in “Unto This Last”, albeit without Ruskin’s overtly Biblical allusions. Either way, by 1869 every element of the poem we have examined in this essay is present with the important exception of the verse paragraph concerning Jenny’s “clock.” This, together with its Ruskinian vision of the poem’s speaker and Jenny “meeting,” has no place in the 1869 poem, even though the final images of “a far gleam” and a “dark path” are both present. What this means is that the final, 1870 published version of the poem that we have been analyzing here further develops and foregrounds the Ruskinian alternatives to political economy’s modes of interpretation. On the eve of the poem’s publication, in other words, Rossetti balances the poem slightly more evenly towards the “gentle” rather than the “destructive” version of rich and poor “meeting.”

I am not suggesting, in this summary, that the poem’s critical and discursive strategies are identical with those found in Ruskin’s writing, or that Rossetti is in some kind of debt to Ruskin for the political ambitions and formulations to be found in “Jenny.” It is rather the case that there is some partial overlap between “Unto This Last” and “Jenny,” even in the latter’s first, 1848 version. The critical potential of Rossetti’s poem seems thus to have developed in parallel to, or perhaps in the wake of, Ruskin’s interest in the limits of political economic analysis. Rossetti’s particular brand of irony, his extreme and full-blown articulation of the stultification theory, and his secular reimagining of Ruskin’s correct

“meeting” between rich and poor, nevertheless mark his poem out as an original and significant contribution to the process of challenging political economy that is newly energized around the middle of the nineteenth century. And since, as O’Gorman records, “Unto This Last” was received extremely negatively in 1860 and for several years thereafter, one must see Rossetti’s poem as an early example of a positive reading, and a sympathetic handling, of the central ideas of that work.<sup>70</sup> Both Ruskin and Rossetti thus participate in different ways in the reconceptualization of political economy’s mental stultification theory that begins with Mill in 1848.

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<sup>1</sup> Dante Rossetti, “Jenny” in Collected Poetry and Prose, ed. J. McGann (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 60-8, l. 185; references to this edition will hereafter be made simply by line numbers in the text.

<sup>2</sup> These are J. B. Bullen’s terms, from his The Pre-Raphaelite Body (Oxford University Press, 1998), 62-3.

<sup>3</sup> Amanda Anderson, Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 142.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel A. Harris, “D. G. Rossetti’s ‘Jenny’: Sex, Money, and the Interior Monologue,” Victorian Poetry 22 (Summer, 1984): 201.

<sup>5</sup> A. Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society, ed. D. Forbes (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1966), 182.

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, Essay, 183.

<sup>7</sup> Ferguson, Essay, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Ferguson has so much to say about human activity, in both his Essay and his other work, that it can barely be summarized here; the values he finds in human energy even lead to his paradoxical superstition of reading and book learning: “we endeavour to derive from imagination and thought, what is in reality matter of experience and sentiment: and we endeavour, through the grammar of dead languages, and the channel of commentators, to arrive at the beauties of thought and elocution, which sprang from the animated spirit of society, and were taken from the living impression of an active life” (ibid., 30).

<sup>9</sup> For more on the tension between classical republicanism and commercial society, see S. Copley, “Introduction” in Literature and the Social Order in Eighteenth-Century England, ed. S. Copley (London:

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Croom Helm, 1984), 13-14, and J. G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton University Press, 1975), 486-7.

<sup>10</sup> The question of Ferguson's influence is a vexed one, and thus in what follows I shall refer to Smith's known influence over nineteenth-century political economists even though Ferguson is the earliest and most thorough exponent of mental stultification (Ricardo, Malthus and Mill are all overt readers and admirers of Smith's Wealth of Nations); for two different interpretations of Ferguson's influence, see F. Oz-Salzberger, "Introduction" in An Essay on the History of Civil Society, ed. F. Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge University Press, 1995), vii-xxv; and D. Forbes, "Introduction" in An Essay on the History of Civil Society 1767, ed. D. Forbes (Edinburgh University Press, 1966), xiii-xli. Oz-Salzberger sees the Essay as receiving immediate and widespread acclaim and exerting considerable influence, while Forbes finds Ferguson to be significantly more influential in Germany and America than in Britain.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, eds. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1976), II, 781-2.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Wealth of Nations, I, 27.

<sup>13</sup> See Smith, Wealth of Nations, II, 783 and A. Ferguson, Essay, 183.

<sup>14</sup> On the question of Smith's influence, Keith Tribe notes that Smith's "reputation as the founder of modern economics was already established by the late eighteenth century;" see Keith Tribe, "Adam Smith: Critical Theorist?" Journal of Economic Literature 37 (June, 1999): 609-32 (609).

<sup>15</sup> Michio Morishima, Ricardo's Economics (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 3; for Maxine Berg, likewise, Ricardo's model-based approach to political economy has an ultimately "negative purpose:" it is "a counterfactual, set up precisely in order to emphasise the significance of the factors from which Ricardo abstract[s] — free trade and technological improvement" (Maxine Berg, The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy: 1815-1848 (CUP, 1980), 47).

<sup>16</sup> Ricardo, David. Principles of Political Economy, ed. P. Sraffa (Cambridge: CUP, 1951), 99, 100 & 388.

<sup>17</sup> In Catherine Gallagher's terms, Ricardo is "extremely sparing with the language of sensation," in comparison to his contemporaries, the term "happiness" being used only twice in the Principles, for instance; see The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel (Princeton University Press, 2006), 60.

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<sup>18</sup> John Pullen, “Introduction,” in Thomas Malthus, The Principles of Political Economy, ed. J. Pullen, 2 vols. (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), I, xxvi; this plan was unsuccessful because of David Buchanan’s very similar work which was published in 1814.

<sup>19</sup> At the East India College; see Pullen, “Introduction,” xxviii.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, Wealth of Nations, II, 782.

<sup>21</sup> Malthus, Principles, I, 223.

<sup>22</sup> Malthus, Principles, I, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Malthus, Principles, I, 473-4.

<sup>24</sup> Malthus, Principles, I, 474.

<sup>25</sup> Malthus, Principles, I, 475.

<sup>26</sup> Mill’s innovations lie in a number of areas of his Political Economy, not least in his assertion that the “distribution” of economic products and wealth is entirely a matter of human design and his anticipation of an egalitarian society of the near future free from the ideologies of competition and growth; for more detailed comment on Mill’s departure from his contemporaries and predecessors, see Schwartz, The New Political Economy of J. S. Mill (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> John Stuart Mill, Principles of Political Economy, ed. J. M. Robson, 2 vols., in Collected Words of John Stuart Mill, vols. II-III (London: Routledge, 1965), I, 367.

<sup>28</sup> For Mill’s account of this subject, see II, 752-7.

<sup>29</sup> This forward-looking aspect of Mill’s political economy has received rather negative critical treatment; for V. W. Bladen, the editor of the authoritative scholarly edition of Mill’s complete works for example, one should distinguish between Mill the political economist and Mill “the preacher” in his Principles; the point of Bladen’s distinction is to delimit what is appropriate to political economy as a practical science of social mechanisms, and what belongs in a more speculative, non-empirical discourse (see V. W. Bladen, “Introduction” in Mill, Principles, I, xxxix).

<sup>30</sup> Mill, Principles, II, 762 & 759.

<sup>31</sup> Mill, Principles, II, 763.

<sup>32</sup> Mill, Principles, II, 761-2.

<sup>33</sup> Engels’s version of this idea is more antagonistic than Mill’s, however: his “workers retain their humanity only so long as they cherish a burning fury against the property-owning class,” and the “whole system of modern political economy [...] will collapse as soon as the workers [...] act like human beings who can think as

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well as toil;" see Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, trans. & ed. W. O.

Henderson & W. H. Chaloner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 129 & 248.

<sup>34</sup> See Mill, Principles, II, 767-96 and also 202-14.

<sup>35</sup> Bela Balassa, "Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill," Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv 83 (1959): 147; despite Balassa's observation of this "puzzle" being made nearly fifty years ago, this is still a significantly neglected area of study; a slightly more recent account of Marx and Mill's similarities, albeit of their technical rather than ideological closeness, can be found in Bernice Shoul, "Similarities in the Work of John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx," Science & Society 29 (Summer, 1965): 270-95.

<sup>36</sup> Mill, Principles, II, 764.

<sup>37</sup> Mill, Principles, II, 765.

<sup>38</sup> Mill, Principles, II, 765.

<sup>39</sup> It is frequently remarked that elements such as this, together with the notably positive treatment of communal ownership in Mill's Principles, bear the stamp of Harriet Taylor's influence; an authoritative summary of this issue can be found in Schwartz, J. S. Mill, 212-21.

<sup>40</sup> Donald Winch, "1848 and All That: The Political and Economic Context of Mill's Principles," Donald Winch Archive, ed. R. Whatmore (University of St. Andrews, 2013), accessed 11 August 2014, <<http://www.intellectualhistory.net/donald-winch/>>; Schwartz similarly records that Mill's "authority as an economist was unrivalled in his own country by any other thinker" for the "twenty-five years" after the publication of the Principles (Schwartz, J. S. Mill, p. 1), while Martin Wiener traces Mill's influence and authority well into the twentieth century (see Martin Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980 (CUP, 2004), 90).

<sup>41</sup> 1848 itself, for instance, was the year of the unsuccessful final Chartist meeting on Kennington Common; but one might class the wealth of scholarship on corresponding societies, the universal suffrage movement, political uprisings and so on as amassing empirical evidence of burgeoning class consciousness throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

<sup>42</sup> Maxine Berg offers an excellent account of the centrality of political economy to a variety of cultural institutions and also records the extent to which political debate was dominated by Ricardian principles; see The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy, 1815-1848 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 161-66 & 255.

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<sup>43</sup> Bullen describes how Ruskin was Rossetti's friend and financial supporter between these years, and also that Rossetti taught at the Working Men's College in Red Lion Square, London that Ruskin "helped to establish;" see J. B. Bullen, "Rossetti, Dante Gabriel (1828-1882)," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed 11 August 2014, < [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24140](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24140)>.

<sup>44</sup> John Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, 3 vols. (London: George Allen, 1893), II, 158, 161.

<sup>45</sup> Ruskin, Stones of Venice, 160.

<sup>46</sup> Ruskin, Stones of Venice, 161.

<sup>47</sup> Francis O'Gorman, "'Suppose It Were Your Own Father Of Whom You Spoke:' Ruskin's Unto This Last," The Review of English Studies 51 (May, 2000): 233; for a more thorough account of Ruskin's relationship with mainstream contemporary political economy than I am able to give in this essay, see Alan Lee, "Ruskin and Political Economy: Unto this Last," in New Approaches to Ruskin: Thirteen Essays, ed. R. Hewison (London: Routledge, 1981), 68-88.

<sup>48</sup> John Ruskin, "Unto This Last:" Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy, ed P. M. Yarker (London: Collins, 1970), 110.

<sup>49</sup> Ruskin, "Unto This Last," 110.

<sup>50</sup> Ruskin, "Unto This Last," 43.

<sup>51</sup> Ruskin, "Unto This Last," 28.

<sup>52</sup> Ruskin, "Unto This Last," 40.

<sup>53</sup> Ruskin, "Unto This Last," 95.

<sup>54</sup> Ruskin, "Unto This Last," 60.

<sup>55</sup> Harris, "D. G. Rossetti's 'Jenny,'" 201-2.

<sup>56</sup> Robin Sheets, "Pornography and Art: The Case of 'Jenny,'" Critical Inquiry 14 (Winter, 1988): 327.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Sinfield, Dramatic Monologue (London: Methuen, 1977), 41.

<sup>58</sup> Sinfield, Dramatic Monologue, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Sinfield, Dramatic Monologue, 32.

<sup>60</sup> See Harris, "D. G. Rossetti's 'Jenny,'" 198-99.

<sup>61</sup> Ruskin, "Unto This Last," 63.

<sup>62</sup> Harris, "D. G. Rossetti's 'Jenny,'" 205 & 198.

<sup>63</sup> Sheets. "Pornography," 320.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Sheets, "Pornography," 320.

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<sup>65</sup> Sheets, for instance, describes how Ruskin advised contemporary women to “leave the sheltered gardens of their homes and go down into ‘the darkness of the terrible streets’ in order to save the ‘feeble florets [who] are lying, with all their fresh leaves torn, and their stems broken;’” see Sheets, “Pornography,” 321.

<sup>66</sup> According to Jerome McGann et al, the editors of the online Rossetti Archive; see, “‘Jenny:’ Scholarly Commentary,” The Rossetti Archive, accessed 11 August 2014, <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/3-1848.raw.html>>.

<sup>67</sup> See “Jenny (early fair copy),” ll. 58-64, The Rossetti Archive, ed. J. McGann et al, accessed 11 August 2014, <[www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/3-1848.delms.rad.html#3-1848](http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/3-1848.delms.rad.html#3-1848)>; Sheets misreads the “impotence” of this line as a reference to the poem’s speaker himself (“Pornography,” 328).

<sup>68</sup> John Ruskin, The Letters of John Ruskin, in The Complete Works of John Ruskin, vols. XXXVI-XXXVII, eds. E. T. Cook & Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1909), 342.

<sup>69</sup> “‘Jenny:’ Scholarly Commentary,” The Rossetti Archive.

<sup>70</sup> O’Gorman, “Suppose it Were,” 230.